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ABSTRACT

The policy statement of the 1982 Wingspread Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged is presented. The conference examined the past decade of postsecondary education opportunity programs for disadvantaged and minority students and how the objectives of the programs should be pursued in the 1980s and beyond. Recommendations are presented concerning the following areas: (1) the need for quality education for all, including minority and disadvantaged students; (2) recognition of the interrelatedness of all levels of education, since efforts that improve achievement at the elementary and secondary levels increase the likelihood of success at the postsecondary level; (3) state and federal action in cooperation with postsecondary institutions to overcome the underrepresentation of minority students in many career areas and particularly at the postgraduate level and in the more prestigious and highly selective courses of study; (4) recognition of the experiences and effectiveness of postsecondary opportunity programs for minorities and disadvantaged; and (5) political action on the part of the educational community to respond to the fiscal and social crisis threatening equal educational opportunity. (SW)

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Minority and Disadvantaged Students in Postsecondary Education

A statement from the June 1982 "Policy Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged."

HE 016 264

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The Policy Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged

The policy statement of participants in a conference on post-secondary programs for the disadvantaged sponsored by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the New York State Board of Regents, with the cooperation of the Johnson Foundation.

Wingspread
Racine, Wisconsin
June 1982

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Introduction

With the assistance of a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the New York State Board of Regents, a national invitational "Policy Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged" convened in June 1982, at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The conference examined the past decade of postsecondary education opportunity programs for disadvantaged and minority students and how the objectives of the programs should be pursued in the 1980's and beyond.

The need for the conference stemmed from a recognition that the conditions which created the postsecondary education opportunity programs have changed. These programs, which were virtually nonexistent before 1970, now exist at nearly every campus in the country located in an urban area or serving numbers of minority students. In their first decade, they have expanded beyond recruitment and admissions to a whole range of academic and financial support services. Now undergraduate racial integration is well underway and more broadly based programs of financial aid and developmental education exist alongside the postsecondary education opportunity programs. In an atmosphere of fierce competition for public resources, these programs face an uncertain future.

The conference was structured around a series of commissioned papers paired with shorter reaction papers. The papers were the basis for directed discussions covering the political, financial, academic, social, and ethical dimensions of the issue. Based on these discussions, the participants developed a number of policy recommendations.

A national advisory committee representing major geographic regions, agencies, and constituencies guided the conference, itself a successor to a 1970 conference at Wingspread which helped set in motion many of the postsecondary education opportunity programs. The Johnson Foundation, headquartered at Wingspread, was host to the conference.

Participants in the conference included 55 policy makers from government and postsecondary education, state agencies, postsecondary education opportunity programs, and educational organizations.

The major conclusion of the 1970 conference was that many barriers limited the access of disadvantaged and minority students to

postsecondary education. The finding of the 1982 conference was that, despite progress in achieving equity during the decade of the 1970's, disadvantaged and minority students are still severely underrepresented at all levels of postsecondary education.

Reflecting this conclusion, the conference developed a Conference Statement consisting of a number of policy recommendations for educational, political, and governmental actions. The Statement follows.

A complete report on the conference, including the commissioned papers and the Statement, will be published in 1983 by the College Board. Further information on the conference and on relevant publications is available from:

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The Policy Statement
of the 1982 Wingspread Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged

We believe that the American promise to enable each person to become all he or she is capable of being will be met *only* if all means for personal development are equally available to all people, regardless of circumstances or background. While we recognize that progress has been made toward achieving greater access for minority and disadvantaged populations, they are still severely underrepresented at all levels of postsecondary education. Furthermore, this country's position in the family of nations can be maintained only if it realizes the development of all people to their full potential, particularly those from groups which have been historically excluded from higher education.

The conference places special emphasis on the need for:

- Quality education for all, including minority and disadvantaged students;
- Recognition of the interrelatedness of all levels of education, since efforts which improve achievement at the elementary and secondary levels increase the likelihood of success at the postsecondary level;
- State and federal action in cooperation with postsecondary institutions to overcome the underrepresentation of minority students in many career areas and particularly at the postgraduate level and in the more prestigious and highly selective courses of study;
- Recognition of the experiences and effectiveness of postsecondary opportunity programs for minorities and the disadvantaged;
- Political action on the part of the educational community to respond to the fiscal and social crisis threatening equal educational opportunity.

The Need for Quality

Wingspread participants recommend the following positions relating to quality:

1. Equal educational opportunity for minorities and the disadvantaged must be interpreted as an equal opportunity for *quality* education. We define quality as excellence in academic preparation at all levels, soundly based in the essential disciplines,

for graduation from secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate institutions.

2. The quality of an educational institution is determined by a mix of factors having to do with faculty, resources, and students. However, the most important quality indicator for an institution must be its success in insuring that it educates students to meet performance standards that enable them to function effectively in the next steps in their education and their careers, and not the level of preparation of the students it admits.
3. The value of institutions in providing opportunity to minorities and the disadvantaged must be measured by the extent to which they educate students while helping to satisfy their social and psychological needs, without compromising appropriate exit standards.

These positions follow from a recognition that public dissatisfaction with the state of the economy, social changes over the last decade, and disenchantment with educational effectiveness at all levels have led to calls for higher standards of educational quality. We are also concerned that some institutions have not clearly defined quality or have compromised on quality in programs serving disadvantaged or minority students. For this reason, we reemphasize that equal educational opportunity for minorities and the disadvantaged must be interpreted as an equal opportunity for *quality*. The quality of special programs for disadvantaged and minority students should be judged by how effectively such programs contribute to the overall accomplishment of institutional goals.

These new understandings are imperative as this nation considers the future of equal educational opportunities for minorities and the disadvantaged. While acknowledging that many students leave secondary schools unprepared for further education, we caution postsecondary institutions against attempting to assure quality by raising admissions standards without making alternative provisions for admitting less well prepared students who need or can benefit from postsecondary education. Postsecondary institutions must recognize that additional time and resources must be provided to achieve the new definition of quality postsecondary education for all, most importantly for those students who are now receiving inadequate preparation at the elementary and secondary levels.

The Interrelatedness of Elementary, Secondary, and Postsecondary Education

For too long, education has been segmented into elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels with little articulation among the levels. Regarding the interrelatedness of all levels of education, we recommend the following positions:

4. Higher education institutions have a particular responsibility to improve the preparation and training of students who will become elementary and secondary school teachers, especially those who will be teachers of minority and disadvantaged students.
5. Elementary and secondary schools must strengthen curricula and instruction in all disciplines, and concomitantly raise their expectations for performance, so that all students, in particular minority and disadvantaged students, can develop the appropriate competencies for transition to postsecondary education.

Success or failure at one level of education inevitably surfaces at another. For example, deficiencies in the preparation of elementary school teachers, if not corrected, will contribute to low levels of pupil performance in elementary school classes—a condition that will follow these students through junior and senior high school, and, for those who remain in the system, into college and university work. Looked at another way, practices that discriminate against the poor and minorities in elementary and secondary education produce a need for postsecondary programs that address the underpreparation of those who are disadvantaged as a result of such practices. We need to examine and evaluate the present condition of elementary and secondary schools, including the preparation of their personnel and the outcomes of their practices and processes. To the extent that these schools are successful in elevating achievement, the success of their graduates in higher education will be improved.

6. We urge state and local boards of education to take the following actions:
   - Set goals for high achievement by *all* students in reading, writing, and mathematics;
   - Establish management and instructional routines for attaining these goals;
   - Monitor these routines regularly to assess goal achievement;

- Urge principals and faculties in schools with low income and minority students to set high expectations for those students' academic success and to act on the belief that such students can perform at high levels and meet rigorous high school graduation standards;
- Reaffirm principals' responsibility for creating a school climate that is conducive to learning and for insuring student compliance with clear rules and regulations;
- Encourage principals to assist teachers to develop strategies and concepts which lead to high student achievement;
- Reaffirm teachers' responsibility for successful teaching;
- Set graduation requirements in mathematics and scientific literacy at a level that will enable graduates to be successful in college and other endeavors requiring such skills and competencies;
- Review the high school curricula in history, civics, art, music, literature, expression, drama, poetry, and speech so that the contributions of all cultures in America are incorporated—not as an appendage to European culture, but as significant in their own right;
- Provide bilingual instruction, including instruction in content areas, in the students' native languages;
- Orient high school instruction more toward achieving competency and skill mastery rather than subject matter mastery; and,
- Allot more time to instructional activities, and eliminate routines which diminish this time.

School administrators, teachers, and other staff must be better prepared to meet the needs of the disadvantaged and minorities for quality elementary and secondary education. The role of schools of education in providing such preparation is critical.

Governmental Action

The conference participants make the following statement about the problem of underrepresentation of minorities in important career areas:

7. We note the low percentage of minorities pursuing education in fields based in mathematics and science, and the scarcity of minority graduates with advanced degrees, notably doctoral and law degrees. Equal opportunity for quality education de-

mands that institutions make special efforts to encourage and to prepare minority students to enter careers in which they have been traditionally underrepresented, many of which represent areas of high national need. We recommend state and federal actions in cooperation with postsecondary institutions to overcome this deficiency.

Graduate and professional education for the disadvantaged and minorities is a very high priority because of past neglect and present severe underrepresentation. We call for strengthened state and federal efforts that insure more blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans complete advanced degrees, including PH.D's, in the arts and humanities, computer sciences, education, engineering, life sciences, mathematics, physical sciences, and the social sciences, and M.D.'s. Low productivity in many of these fields is a problem of national concern.

8. We further propose the following specific governmental actions to combat the problem:
   - State and federal legislation to encourage and stimulate graduate and professional institutions to develop and implement effective programs increasing minority enrollment, and to provide rewards for doing so;
   - Commitment by state and federal governments to take specific steps to insure that all their agencies recruit increasing numbers of qualified minority and disadvantaged persons and to provide career development for those whom they employ;
   - Critical examination by state and federal governments of policies and practices that may, either directly or indirectly, adversely affect or impede appropriate representation of the disadvantaged and minorities in fields requiring graduate or professional education;
   - Commitment by state and federal governments to strengthen the role of traditionally black institutions, and of institutions predominantly serving ethnic minority groups, in preparing their students for graduate and professional education; and,
   - Commitment by appropriate agencies and organizations to strengthen the role of other undergraduate institutions in preparing the disadvantaged and minorities for graduate and professional education.

Although these recommendations for specific action are addressed to state and federal governments for the most part, we understand that people in educational institutions and in communities, committed to the ideal of fuller representation of the disadvantaged and minorities, must work diligently, forcefully, and continuously for its achievement. The disadvantaged and minorities must acquire genuinely effective intellectual and professional skills. If they fail to do so, the national ideals of equality and reponsibility are hollow. Effective enabling legislation is essential, as are the efforts of people of good will.

Proven Strategies

The experiences of postsecondary opportunity programs for the disadvantaged and minorities have yielded numerous concrete strategies and results. We recommend the following policies and practices:

9. The effectiveness of postsecondary opportunity programs for the disadvantaged and minorities must be recognized. Such programs have effected some of the most significant improvements in postsecondary education of the last two decades by promoting access and by helping students who might otherwise not have had the benefits of a college education to satisfy academic standards of success. They have also provided advocacy and provided role models for students. We recommend continuing and strengthening such programs.
10. The experiences of postsecondary opportunity programs for the disadvantaged and minorities suggest that successful programs have a number of common elements. These include:
    - Strength and continuity of program administrative leadership;
    - Staff and faculty expectations that students can succeed;
    - Pre-semester/pre-college orientation;
    - Adequately targeted remedial/developmental courses and appropriate recognition of successful completion of these courses;
    - Accurate advice and information about selecting courses and professors and about tranferability of credits;
    - Concentration of special services at certain crucial times (i.e., first semester of freshman year and following transfer);

- Timely academic advisement and career counseling;
- Commitment to opportunity programs at the chief executive level;
- Articulation with secondary schools and between two- and four-year colleges;
- Clear outlining of services and expectations for students;
- Continuous monitoring and feedback of student progress.

All postsecondary programs are urged to incorporate these effective approaches.

11. We also urge all institutions of higher education to follow the example of postsecondary opportunity programs in treating *all* students with dignity, irrespective of their previous experiences, present qualifications, financial need, major, or need for special assistance. Positive ego reinforcement and acceptable self-image are facilitators of success.

The Political Agenda

We call on the higher education community for political action to respond to the crises threatening equal educational opportunity, including proposed governmental reductions in funding, increasingly restrictive admissions requirements, and reductions in minority enrollments. Political action for equal opportunity for quality education for disadvantaged and minority groups involves multiple levels: campus-based groups, community organizations, state and federal legislatures, and constituency and national educational organizations, acting both singly and in concert.

12. People in academic communities concerned with equal educational opportunity have an obligation to: inform and promote civic education; establish alliances with groups such as faculty, administrators, governing boards, students, parents, alumni, and labor organizations; give expert testimony on issues relevant to the disadvantaged; and coalesce in professional and disciplinary organizations to mobilize their collective strength.

Conclusion

As we move toward a post-industrial society, the future of our nation will depend on the strength of our human resources. Investment in human capital to achieve the maximum educational development of all people therefore becomes our first priority. Concerned people must promote and advocate financial aid entitlement programs, compensatory education services, institutional support programs, and all of those practices which enhance equal educational opportunity. Concerned people are not just people in the academic community. We must work to include parents, community organizations, and, especially, those who have already benefitted from participation in such programs. Minority educational constituency and disciplinary groups especially must give leadership to articulating progress or retrogression in higher education by calling attention to such indicators of institutional commitment as admissions and retention policies and results, hiring faculty and staff from underrepresented groups, appropriate curriculum, and adequate budget.

Until all of the least advantaged groups are fully included in all levels of higher education, we have not attained the goal of equal educational opportunity. There is in the nation an inequitable distribution of minorities at the various levels and in the various disciplines and types of postsecondary education. The goal of equal opportunity for quality education will not have been realized until effective steps have been taken to remove all of the barriers that have excluded these groups.

The Policy Conference on Postsecondary
Programs for the Disadvantaged
Wingspread
Racine, Wisconsin
June, 1982

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at the "Policy Conference on Postsecondary Programs for the Disadvantaged"

Wingspread

June 1982

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